

- Hellmayr, C. E. 1910. Notes sur quelques oiseaux de l'Amérique tropicale. *Rev. Fr. Orn.* 1: 161-165.
- Hilty, S. L., & Brown, W. L. 1986. *A guide to the birds of Colombia*. Princeton, N. J.
- Meyer de Schauensee, R., & Phelps, W. H., Jr. 1978. *A guide to the birds of Venezuela*. Princeton, N. J.
- Nicéforo, H. M. & Olivares, A. 1967. Adiciones a la avifauna Colombiana, IV. *Hornero* 10: 403-435.
- Parker, T. A., III, Parker, S. A. & Plenge, M. A. 1982. *An annotated checklist of Peruvian birds*. Vermillion, So. Dakota.
- Peters, J. L. 1945. *Check-list of birds of the world*, Vol. 5. Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Ruschi, A. 1982. Uma nova espécie de beija-flor do Brasil: *Amazilia rondoniae* n. sp. e a chave para determinar as espécies de *Amazilia* que ocorrem no Brasil. *Bol. Mus. Biol. Mello Leitão, Série Zool.* 100: 1-2.
- Ruschi, A. 1986. Aves do Brasil. Vol. 5. *Beija-flores*. Expressão e Cultura, Rio de Janeiro.
- Schuchmann, K.-L., Weller, A.-A. & Heynen, I. (2001). Systematics and biogeography of the Andean genus *Eriocnemis* (Aves: Trochilidae). *J. Ornithol.* 142: 433-482.
- Sick, H. 1993. *Birds in Brazil*. Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, N. J.
- Simon, E. L. 1910. Catalogue général des Trochilidés observés jusqu'à ce jour dans la republique de l'Ecuador. *Rev. Fr. Orn.* 1: 257-270.
- Simon, E. L. 1921. *Histoire naturelle des Trochilidae (synopsis et catalogue)*. Paris.
- Stephens, L., & Traylor, M. A., Jr. 1983. *Ornithological gazetteer of Peru*. Cambridge, Mass.
- Taczanowski, L. 1884. *Ornithologie du Pérou*, Vol. 1. Rennes.
- Weller, A.-A. 1998. *Biogeographie, geographische Variation und Taxonomie der Gattung Amazilia (Aves: Trochilidae)*. Unpubl. Ph.D. thesis, Rhein. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Univ., Bonn.
- Weller, A.-A. 1999. Genus *Agyrtria* Reichenbach, 1854. Pp. 597-599 in del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., & J. Sargatal (eds.), *Handbook of the birds of the world*, Vol. 5. Lynx Edicions. Barcelona.
- Weller, A.-A. 2000. Biogeography, geographical variation and taxonomy of the Neotropical hummingbird genus *Polyerata* Heine, 1863 (Aves: Trochilidae). Pp. 47-54 in Rheinwald, G. (ed.), *Isolated vertebrate communities in the tropics*. Bonn. Zool. Monogr. 46.
- Zimmer, J. T. 1950. Studies of Peruvian birds. - No. 59. The genera *Polytmus*, *Leucippus*, and *Amazilia*. *Am. Mus. Novit.* 1475: 1-27.

Address: A.-A. Weller, Research Group "Biology and Phylogeny of Tropical Birds", Ornithology, Alexander Koenig Research Institute and Museum of Zoology, Adenauerallee 160, 53113 Bonn, Germany; e-mail: a.weller@uni-bonn.de

© British Ornithologists' Club 2002

## Further observations of a *Microeca* flycatcher from the Bismarck Archipelago, Papua New Guinea

by Phil Gregory & Jon Hornbuckle

Received 29 December 2001

The genus *Microeca* contains six species, in the family *Petroicidae*, the Australo-Papuan Robins, a heterogeneous group of small to medium-sized insectivorous birds in 14 genera (Sibley & Monroe 1990). The *Microeca* species strongly resemble the Old World flycatchers in appearance and behaviour but are restricted to New Guinea and Australia, except for the Golden-bellied Flycatcher *M. hemixantha* which is

found further west in the forests of the Tanimbar Islands of Indonesia. All are birds of lowland and hill (Lemon-bellied Flycatcher *M. flavigaster*, Olive Flycatcher *M. flavovirescens*, Yellow-legged Flycatcher *M. griseiceps*), or montane forests (Canary Flycatcher *M. papuana*), with varying degrees of yellow in the plumage, except for the rather different Jacky Winter *M. fascinans* of dry lowland woods in Australia and savanna habitat around Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, which is basically brown above and whitish below with extensive white outer tail feathers.

Brian Finch, Kathleen Shurcliff and the late John McKean were the first observers to report the presence of a *Microeca* species on the Bismarck Archipelago, Papua New Guinea, finding two birds near sea level at Lavege on New Britain, and two at 1,400 m near Taron on New Ireland between 20 and 27 April 1984 (Finch & McKean 1987). Single *Microeca*-type flycatchers were seen by Tony Palliser in the mountains near Taron, New Ireland in early December 1987 (Palliser 1988, Coates 1990). No further records of this genus on the archipelago have been published but there have been a few subsequent sightings, which we document here.

Single *Microeca*-type flycatchers were seen by Guy Dutson (*in litt.*) at 900 m near Taron on 4 August 1997 and by K. David Bishop (pers. comm.) near Walindi, West New Britain in 1998.

Neil Bostock, Jon Hornbuckle, Keith Turner and Barry Wright had three records in May 1999. The first, at 60 m above sea level at Gigipuna, New Britain, on 11 May, was of three birds in close proximity, 10 - 15 m away in roadside trees. They were observed for 15 min in good light, perched 3-10 m up, occasionally flycatching as well as possibly displaying, with frequent wing-flicking and lowering of wings to a drooped position, the tail also being lowered at the same time as the wings. No vocalizations were heard. To European eyes, they were small (12-13 cm), *Ficedula*-type flycatchers, like Red-breasted Flycatcher *F. parva*, hence almost certainly a *Microeca* species. The head was very rounded, with a dark eye and grey-brown plumage, slightly paler around the eye. The loreal region to above the eye was also slightly paler than the crown but this paleness did not extend behind the eye. The bill was small, fairly broad-based, dark with a slightly paler base to the lower mandible. The throat was off-white, the underparts had a slight buffy wash, and one of the individuals showed an obvious pale central belly stripe, not noted on the other two. All had a whitish vent, and a square-ended tail, black underneath. Primaries were blackish, noticeably darker than other flight feathers and mantle, the latter being a grey-brown colour, as were the wing coverts. The primary projection was short, with little extension beyond the tertials. Leg colour was not noted. GD noted slight differences from this: his bird, high up a tree 30 m away, appeared to have a slightly darker cap; the pale lores extended through the eye across the face; the throat had a yellowish wash and the flanks a pale yellow wash.

An individual of what appeared to be the same species was subsequently seen by NB, JH, KT and BW on Mt Agil, New Ireland, at 680 m on 18 May, perched 10-15 m up in primary forest. It was difficult to discern details due to the height of the bird

and the poor light conditions. Two days later, a similar bird was observed briefly a few kms away in roadside trees at 400 m.

Phil Gregory and Chris Eastwood saw a single bird along the Limbin Road, central New Ireland,  $03^{\circ}16' 0.72''$  S,  $151^{\circ}55' 76.9''$  E, on 1 June 1999 at an altitude of *c.* 850 m. Views of this bird, up to 30 m away, were in good light against both a leafy background and grey sky. The bird was watched for 30 minutes through a 30x telescope. It was initially perched on a tall dead acacia-type tree *c.* 10 km from the start of the Limbin to Lelet road, by a large clearing, and was a typical small *Microeca*-type flycatcher. It differed from the Lemon-bellied Flycatcher of mainland Papua New Guinea, which occupies a similar habitat and has comparable habits, by being entirely brown above with a pale loreal line, which extended indistinctly just past the dark eye. No grey was evident in the plumage, nor did the wings appear darker than the rest of the upperparts. The frons was pale, showing as a line at the base of the bill, a feature also shown by the Lemon-bellied Flycatcher in Papua New Guinea, but this bird was entirely dull whitish below with just a hint of pale olive yellow on the chin and throat in some conditions. The legs and feet were a dark grey, and the bill dark with a pale base to the lower mandible. Rictal bristles were also noted.

The voice was distinctive: a sweet twittering silvery song with a slightly buzzing quality, rather quiet and easily overlooked. It was given from a perch, the tail vibrating as the bird sang, and no song flight was noted. GD noted that his bird sang with a repeated high-pitched warble 'sweet-toi-toi-(toi-toi)' - consistent with PG's description. The Lemon-bellied Flycatcher often sings in flight and the song lacks the buzzy quality of this bird. The bird was very hard to detect as it sat on the ends of branches often near the centre of a large tree, for minutes on end.

PG had an additional, much briefer, sighting on 22 June 2000, at 950 m *c.* 12 km along the Limbin-Lelet road, New Ireland, again perched and singing from a tall dead snag. The basic appearance was of a brown above and white below *Microeca*.

The New Britain birds described by Finch & McKean (1987) had a greyish head and sides of face, giving a capped appearance and lacking a loreal line. They stated the upperparts to be dark olive with brownish-black wings and uniformly buff-olive underparts from chin to vent with highlights on the centre of the breast and along the flanks. The legs were dark, but they could not see whether the lower mandible was pale, although it did not appear to be. These authors reported that the New Ireland hill forest individuals were similar but did not seem as olive as the New Britain birds, although they did have the grey-capped head and dark feet. They described the song as a sweet "swit-tee" given rapidly, almost halfway between that of the Lemon-bellied Flycatcher and the Yellow-legged Flycatcher, in volume more like the latter. Both these plumage descriptions are somewhat different from subsequent reports, but this could be an artefact of lighting conditions and angles of view.

The birds differ in both plumage and song from the Lemon-bellied Flycatcher, which occupies lowland and hill open woodland and savanna habitat in Papua New Guinea and has similar habits. Other species of *Microeca* in New Guinea differ

significantly in plumage and can be excluded from consideration. The Yellow-legged Flycatcher, of lowland and hill forest from New Guinea and Cape York Peninsula, Australia, has bright yellowish legs and a greyish head with white throat. The bright yellow Canary Flycatcher is strictly montane and has bright orange legs, whilst the Olive, also of lowland and hill forest, is entirely olive and yellowish with a distinctive reeling call.

Although there are no specimens or photographs, an unobtrusive, low-density population of a *Microeca*-type species clearly exists in the hill forest of New Ireland and the lowland forest of New Britain. It is possible that two taxa are involved, but as yet no consistent differences have been noted between birds on the two islands, as all descriptions of the birds differ to some degree. The bird is most likely an insular allo-species of *M. flavigaster*, a widespread Australasian species, and represents a considerable range extension for the genus. Tape recordings and a specimen are desirable before firm conclusions can be reached, but this note serves to draw attention to a hitherto overlooked taxon. The authors would welcome receipt of any additional sightings.

#### Acknowledgements

We should like to thank David Bishop, Bruce Beehler, Guy Dutson, Tony Palliser and Barry Wright for their comments and records, and Brian Coates for constructive comments on the text.

#### References

- Coates, B. J., 1990. *The birds of Papua New Guinea*. Vol 2. Dove Publications, Alderley.  
Coates, B. J. & Peckover, W. S., 2001. *Birds of New Guinea and the Bismarck Archipelago*. Dove Publications, Alderley.  
Finch, B. W. & McKean, J. L., 1987. Some notes on the Birds of the Bismarks (sic). *Muruk* 2: 3-28.  
Palliser, T., 1988. New Guinea trip report (unpublished).  
Sibley, C. G. & Monroe, B. L., Jr. 1990. *Distribution and taxonomy of birds of the world*. Yale Univ. Press, New Haven.

*Addresses:* P. Gregory, PO Box 387, Kuranda, Queensland, Australia 4872. Email: sicklebill@austarnet.com.au ; J. Hornbuckle 35 Grove Road, Sheffield S7 2GY, UK. Email: kagu@blueyonder.co.uk